

12 YEARS A SLAVE

By Lorraine Viade, Psy.D.



12 Years a Slave is an excruciating film to watch because it is so intimate, so personal and so moving. You will not soon forget the images and the suffering portrayed in this story of a free man, beautifully portrayed by Chiwetel Ejiofor, who is forced to live in ways few of us who are not African American will ever understand – no matter how many films we see. *12 years a Slave* is as close as we can ever get to understand the horrors of slavery in America. The heroic story of a man who endures torture, loss, humiliation and degradation at the hands of slave owners and slave drivers is something that should be shown in every classroom in America. Courage, determination and dignity are the qualities of a man who has no hope but that which he generates himself. How he uses his knowledge and intellect to outwit and thwart the scorn and evil shown to him is what makes this such a worthy film. Who is truly the master of his fate?

The film excels also in demonstrating the plight of women who were enslaved sexually and how those who were singled out by their masters paid an immeasurable price. They suffered separation from beloved children and family members only to be used at the mercy of masters and their equally cruel wives. *12 Years a Slave* reminds us of just how important the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Underground Railroad and the Civil Rights Movement were and continue to be. Freedom and liberty are not something that should ever be taken for granted especially by those who have always enjoyed it. This is why *12 Years a Slave* hits home on so many levels. I could imagine being thrown into that setting, that situation, that life given the wrong circumstances or just being misfortunate enough to live in the wrong place and time.

Man, woman, husband, wife, child, friend, enslaved or free, humanity remains sacred. Those who lost their humanity were really the slave owners and their kind whose cruelty, racism and prejudice still exist in the darkest hearts living in America today. Human trafficking still exists. And those who hold others prisoners against their wills are no better than those plantation owners. People are still living horrible lives in hell at the mercy of people who abuse and exploit them for personal or economic reasons.

However, in the midst of all evil, there are those decent people who will risk themselves for the salvation of another simply because that is the right thing to do. They do so because they know what I know. The human spirit is something that cannot be shackled, beaten or broken; not when the will to survive is strong and the prize of a free life so important. Whether imprisoned by fanatical masters, religious leaders, military despots, terrorists or any other form of oppression, freedom remains a state of mind in the face of all external conditions. Escape is possible if not externally, then internally. And freedom cannot be forfeited without a fight.

I give *12 Years a Slave* five liberty bells.

